

Bright Seeks Details on How New Army Aviation Plan Will Impact Fort Rucker

WASHINGTON, DC- Congressman Bobby Bright directed questions today to Brigadier Generals Walter Davis, Director of Army Aviation, and William T. Crosby, Program Executive Officer, Aviation during a hearing on Army Aviation Programs on the Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces. Congressman Bright is a member of the subcommittee, which oversees vital programs at Fort Rucker. The hearing addressed the status of aircraft and other equipment, as well as lessons learned from Army Aviation's experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. Congressman Bright used his time to ask questions specifically regarding proposed changes to Fort Rucker.

"Fort Rucker has seen its mission requirements increase due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it has yet to see a likewise increase in funding," Bright said. "Secretary Gates's recent announcement regarding Army Aviation was welcome news to everyone associated with Fort Rucker, but we are still awaiting details on the specifics of his proposals. I look forward to learning more about the proposals in the future and continuing to ensure that Fort Rucker and its soldiers have all the resources they need to be successful."

During an April 14, 2009 Press Conference at Fort Rucker, Secretary of Defense Gates stated that he had recommended to the President adding \$500 million in FY 2010 to "increase the throughput of pilots and maintenance crews for our helicoptersto help train more instructors, help with the infrastructure, and possibly get more airframes." In addition, he noted that more up-to-date maintenance facilities and additional classroom space was required.

In response to questions, Generals Crosby and Davis acknowledged that Fort Rucker will continue to play an important role in Army Aviation and they looked forward to working with Congressman Bright and the committee as details in regards to Fort Rucker develop.

Congressman asked the following questions to Generals Crosby and Davis (as prepared):

• Have any detailed requirements based on Secretary Gates's press conference been provided to the Army Aviation School? This appears to be a very ambitious multi-year mandate in terms of personnel, helicopters, and military construction that eventually will have a significant impact on Army Aviation and Fort Rucker.

• How many and what types of helicopters might be added to the Army Aviation School as well as units in the operational Army as a result of this initiative? Clearly, the \$500 million figure cited by Secretary Gates is based on some form analysis which likely proposes numbers and types of helicopters required.

• What types of infrastructure will be required at Fort Rucker to support Secretary Gates's initiative? Since the typical military construction cycle from funding to completion is about 5 years, won't this slow down efforts to decrease pilot and aircrew throughput at Fort Rucker?

In addition, Congressman Bright submitted the following questions into the record for further review and answers:

• Does the Army currently have all of it required pilots to fully man its general purpose forces Combat Aviation Brigades, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and the training units at Fort Rucker? What percentage of fill do we have for these units, including active and reserve pilots? Is the lack of pilots a function of failing to get enough physically and academically qualified volunteers, of student pilots washing out of flight school, or of pilot attrition due to pilots opting to leave the Army or through retirement?

• What are the qualifications to be an instructor pilot (IP)? Since instructor pilots are a highly select and experienced group, adding additional instructor pilots likely means taking them from Combat Aviation Units in the field. How will replacing these additional IPs with newly-minted pilots affect operations in the field?

• How long will it take for aircrews under this \$500 million initiative to reach units in the field? Will these new crews go to existing units or will the Army create new aviation units?